

ART. V.—*Note on the “Trochilus and Crocodile” of Herodotus.*

To the Editor of the Asiatic Journal.

DEAR SIR,—As the recent very curious and instructive work of Mr. Wilkinson on *the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* is likely to attain a deserved celebrity, it may be as well to correct a mistake into which he has fallen, as to a fact in natural history, particularly as it affects the credit of the Father of History, whose work, notwithstanding its imperfections in many other respects, will generally be found correct in all matters that came under the author's personal observation.

Mr. Wilkinson says, vol. iii. p. 79,

“Herodotus enters into a detail of the habits of the Crocodile, and relates the frequently repeated story of the *Trochilus* entering the animal's mouth during its sleep on the sand banks of the Nile, and relieving it of the leeches which adhere to its throat. The truth of this assertion is seriously impugned, when we recollect that leeches do not abound in the Nile; and the polite understanding supposed to exist between the Crocodile and the bird, becomes more improbable, when we examine the manner in which the throat of the animal is formed; for having no tongue, nature has given it the means of closing it entirely, except when in the act of swallowing, and during sleep the throat is constantly shut though the mouth is open.”

Now on this passage I have to observe, first, that I have seen many Crocodiles caught, but very few that had not many leeches adhering to the inside of their mouths, and that these insects also infest the *Argeelah*, and other animals which feed in the Ganges. Secondly, these leeches are not the *Hirudo medicinalis*, which Mr. Wilkinson is probably correct in asserting not to be common in the Nile, as that species is not usually found in running streams. The leech in question seems to me (I speak with diffidence, being no entomologist) to belong to the genus *Pontobdella*, one species of which infests Cod, Skate, and other fish on the coasts of England. I have no doubt these insects will be found as abundant in the Nile as they are in the waters of Bengal. Thirdly, Herodotus says nothing about the throat of the Crocodile, though his translator Mr. Beloe does. Herodotus says, “the *Trochilus* entering the Crocodile's mouth devours the leeches,” for his words are, *ενθαῦτα ὁ τροχίλος ἐσδύνων ἐς τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ καταπίνει τὰς βδέλλας*.*

* Herod. Euterpe. clxviii.

The Crocodile is not said by Herodotus to be sleeping during the operation, as Mr. Wilkinson asserts, otherwise the observation, "that pleased with the service, he never injures the Trochilus," would be absurd—*ωφελεύμενος ἤδεταί καὶ οὐδὲν σίνεται τὸν τροχίλον*.*

Fourthly, as to the polite understanding which Mr. Wilkinson presumes, this may appear strange to a person only acquainted with wild animals as seen in showmen's caravans and menageries, but not to those who have studied their habits in their native haunts. The facts relating to this subject are worthy of more consideration than I can give them, without deviating from my present purpose; I will therefore only add, that I believe the common Paddy bird of Bengal to be the Trochilus of Herodotus, or a bird of the same genus. Now both Europeans and Bengallees agree in asserting, that this bird is constantly seen standing on the head of the Crocodile, and though I never heard any one assert that he saw it in the act of picking his teeth for him; I think it will be admitted that the visit is not without an object.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

W. C. HURRY.

COSSIPORE,
September, 1839.

ART. VI.—*Documents relative to the application of Camel Draught to Carriages; communicated by C. B. GREENLAW, ESQ., Secretary to the Bengal Steam Committee.*

At a period when the applications of steam to locomotive purposes absorb the attention of the civilized communities of the world, it may seem almost too late to propose new directions of animal power to this object. The copious extracts we now publish from the documents of the "Steam Committee" and of other authorities, will place the subject in a different light. We willingly devote our pages to its consideration, in the conviction of its great value to all classes of Indian Society.

The discovery of the applicability of the Camel to the draught of carriages of every kind, we regard as one of surpassing value to countries of the peculiar climate, and in the still more peculiar social state in which India and Egypt exist, and through which for more than one generation they must slowly and almost insensibly advance.

* Herod. Euterpe. clxviii.